

MEMO

FROM: VARIE
TO: SCOTTISH CULTURAL COMMISSION
RE: CULTURAL POLICY

The enclosed text gives an overview of the rationale, intentions, and ambitions of VARIE (Visual Arts Research Institute, Edinburgh), which is located in the School of Arts, Culture, and Environment, University of Edinburgh.

VARIE's status as an umbrella organisation gives it a potent role as a stimulant to high-level collaboration, co-operation, and co-ordination in the cultural realm. Where else might a group of senior academics and artists meet the leaders of the national cultural institutions to discuss joint initiatives?

As a high-level, professional research institute, VARIE can contribute to the 'arts for all' agenda by bringing its research findings to the public in the most accessible way possible. The obvious vehicle for this is the exhibition, and it should be noted that the VARIE-promoted exhibition *Monet: The Seine and the Sea* (Royal Scottish Academy, 2003) attracted a record audience of 173,000, confirming the appetite of the broader public for the visual arts. At a more specialist level, the public conferences linked to this and other exhibitions attract international speakers and substantial audiences, all of which brings attention to Scotland as a cultural hub.

Beyond the physical borders of Scotland, VARIE's forthcoming journal project, dedicated to global art in translation, will assert the importance of cultural diversity and will challenge stereotypical notions of art practice and history. Funded by a major North American philanthropic trust and published by the University of Chicago Press, this world-class journal will confirm Scotland's presence on the international stage as a vital site of cultural transfer. This is a role that it played during the European enlightenment, when Walter Scott, for example, translated Goethe's play *Götz von Berlichingen* (1773) in one 'fevered night'. It is a role that it is eminently well equipped to play again.

While funding of the journal is already in place, it would be naive to think that good intentions alone will move Scotland's cultural sector into the first rank. Resources must also be dedicated to arts practice, research, teaching, and dissemination. VARIE urges the Scottish Cultural Commission to address the innovative and equitable funding of the arts in Scotland as the core question of its enterprise.

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